

**Testimony of Maria Escalara
To the Appropriations Committee
In Support of Level Funding for the Connecticut Fair Housing Center**

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. My name is Maria Escalara, and I live in Fairfield. I am 56 years old. I am writing to ask you to support level funding for the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, and to share my story of how the Center helped me.

Eight years ago, I got laid off from my job at a manufacturing company. I had been working for my entire adult life, but it was during the recession, and it was really hard to find a new job. The rents are really high in Fairfield County, and so I wasn't able to keep my own place. While I tried to get back on my feet, I stayed with my daughter and other family members and friends, moving from place to place.

A friend told me that the Section 8 waiting list was opening in Fairfield, so I applied – and then I waited. Eventually I was able to find a part-time job as a crossing guard, and then a second part-time job at a laundromat, but I still didn't make enough to get a place of my own. I was basically homeless - if it wasn't for my family and friends letting me stay with them over the years, I could have been on the streets.

I was on the waiting list for a voucher for eight years. Then, in 2016, I found out that I was finally going to get a voucher. I was so happy, and I started looking for a new apartment. I couldn't wait to have my own place again!

I didn't expect that finding a place to use my voucher would be so difficult. Several landlords told me that their apartments were no longer available when I called. I started to get nervous, because you only have a certain amount of time to use your voucher. Finally, I found an ad for a beautiful one-bedroom apartment on a quiet street that seemed perfect. But when I called the landlord and told him I would be using a Section 8 voucher to pay my rent, he told me the place was no longer available. Then, a week later, I saw an ad for the very same apartment posted online again. That's when I knew that something else was going on. My caseworker at the housing authority told me to call the Connecticut Fair Housing Center.

The Center investigated my case, and confronted the landlord, who admitted that the apartment was still available. I was scared to challenge him because I didn't know what would happen, but the Center reassured me that what he did was wrong. A staff person from the Center explained the laws to the landlord, and told him that it is illegal to discriminate against someone because they want to use a housing voucher. After negotiating with him for weeks, finally the landlord agreed to accept my voucher.

A week before Christmas last year, I moved into my beautiful new apartment. I am happy and safe here, and it feels so good to have my own space. No more worrying and moving from place to place. Because of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, I have a home. I wouldn't be here without them. So I am asking you to not cut any funding to the Center so that they can keep helping people like me.

Thank you,
Maria Escalara, Fairfield

(Photo on next page)



Maria Escalara in the kitchen of her new apartment in Fairfield.